BOOK NOTICES

SMITH, NIGEL J.H., J.T. WILLIAMS, DONALD L. PLUCKNETT, and JENNIFER P. TALBOT. 1992. **Tropical Forests and their Crops.** (ISBN 0-8014-2771-1, pbk). Comstock Publishing Associates, a Division of Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY. $27.95 (pbk), $69.95 (hbk). 568 pp.

"Many cultivated plants important for food and income in developing countries arose in tropical forests." A number of these plants are the subjects of this book, grouped into "Beverage and confectionery crops" (e.g., coffee, cacao); "Major fruits" (e.g., mango, citrus, pineapple); "Regional fruits" (e.g., durian, rambutan); "Rubber, oils, and resins" (e.g., oil palm, tropical pines); "Daily bread" (e.g., bananas, breadfruit); "Fuelwood, fodder, and woody grasses" (leucaena and bamboo); "Spices and natural food colorants" (e.g., clove, cinnamon, annatto); and "Nuts" (cashew, Brazil nut, macadamia). Among the data given for these crops are history, evolution, domestication, spread, genetic resources, gene pools, gene banks, germplasm collection, breeding challenges, conservation—not all of these for each crop. Additional chapters discuss the search for new plants to domesticate and the need for and strategies of conservation. Most entries in the 50-page list of "References" are post-1950 (largely from the 1980s). The book is illustrated with black-and-white photos and a few line drawings and is well indexed.—*John W. Thieret.*

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL. 1993. **Vetiver Grass. A Thin Green Line against Erosion.** (ISBN 0-309-04269-0, pbk). National Academy Press, Washington, DC. No price given. 171 pp.

Vetiver, *Vetiveria zizanioides*, has long been cultivated as the source of essential oil of vetiver used in perfumes and soaps. That it is also a grass of much promise for controlling soil erosion in warm areas is being increasingly realized. Hedges of this deep-rooted, robust, densely cespitose plant create impressive "botanical dams" strong enough to retard runoff. Although its use as a hedge plant is not new, it has recently come much into the limelight. This book offers an excellent summary on vetiver: biology, past use, current research, and future prospects. Appendix A highlights "some environmental horrors and points to the role that vetiver might play in alleviating them"; Appendix B, "Other potential vetivers," gives data on other grasses and some shrubs and trees that might be useful in erosion control; Appendix C has selected readings; and Appendix D lists worldwide research contacts. This book and the World Bank's practical handbook *Vetiver grass* (noted in *Sida* 15: 558. 1993) are a most valuable pair for anyone wanting information on this grass.—*John W. Thieret.*